



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



Connecticut's disaster planning must now address the safety of children

A summary of Public Act 11-66

On July 1, 2011 Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed into law legislation that brings child safety into the state's civil preparedness planning.

The legislation—Public Act 11-66, An Act Concerning Children Affected by Disaster and Terrorism—received overwhelming support in the 2011 General Assembly session, winning a 125-1 vote in the House of Representatives and a 36-0 vote in the Senate.

The law requires the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) to expand the state's civil preparedness program to include planning and activities aimed at ensuring the safety of children and youth in the event of natural or man-made disasters or terrorism.

As part of this, all schools and licensed child care providers must adopt written plans for safely evacuating their children in the event of a disaster or terrorism. These plans are to include provisions for notifying parents, reuniting parents and children afterward, and caring for children with special needs.

The new law requires DEMHS to report annually to the General Assembly on the status of this work. The report must address:

1. the health needs associated with bioterrorism and other public health emergencies that are distinct to children;
2. public education and communications for families on public safety issues related to disasters and terrorism;
3. safety and security training measures and multi-hazard response plans for child care providers, school and before- and after-school program personnel, and personnel in family homeless shelters, summer camps, and juvenile justice system facilities;
4. the coordination of school health and mental health strategies; and

5. possible amendments to the state civil preparedness plan and program, as needed.

The legislation emerged from the legislature's Select Committee on Children, whose co-chair, Representative Diana Urban of North Stonington and Stonington, explained the need for it at a May 10 Commission on Children forum on children and disaster planning. As a parent, she said, she wanted to prevent the kind of anguish experienced in disasters like Hurricane Katrina, where it took up 6 months to reunite parents with their children.

"We need to be handling emergencies in a way that parents will know where their children are and that they're safe," she said.

Another key proponent was Senator Joan Hartley of Waterbury, who guided the legislation through the Public Safety and Security Committee, which she co-chairs.

Agencies that provided invaluable input and support included DEMHS and Save the Children, the Westport-based nonprofit recognized around the world as a leader in helping children affected by disaster.

Connecticut was among the first states in the nation to pay attention to the needs of children in homeland security following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Commission on Children Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman said the new law keeps Connecticut in the forefront.

"The natural and unnatural disasters we've experienced in the years after 9/11—like the trash-to-energy plant explosion in Middletown, the workplace shooting in Manchester, and the various extreme-winter weather events—make it evident we need to have plans in place for all state residents, with specific provisions for children," Zimmerman said.

For the full text of the law, video and documents from the May 10 forum, and more, go to www.cga.ct.gov/coc/terrorism.htm.

About the Connecticut Commission on Children: Created with bipartisan support in 1985 by the state legislature, the Commission on Children brings together the various levels of government, the private sector, nonprofit agencies, and philanthropy to promote public policies in the best interests of children. It has a staff of six. Its board, appointed by legislative leaders of both parties, serves on a volunteer basis. Learn more at www.cga.ct.gov/coc.